Oktoēchos of the Syrian Orthodox Churches in South India

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A unique feature of the Christian music repertoire of South India is that it continues to preserve Syriac chants that originated in the Middle East. The liturgical traditions of the early Christians in Antioch (Antakya, in southern Turkey) and Persia (present-day Iran and Iraq) reached South India at various stages in the history of the St. Thomas Christians. This article explores the system of classifying melodies in an eight-week cycle in the liturgy of the Syrian Orthodox churches, known by the Greek name *oktoēchos* ("eight voices"). The system is historically and conceptually related to the church modes of the Latin rite and the oktoēchos of the Byzantine rite, and shares some similarity with Near Eastern maqām traditions. The study of oktoēchos as it is preserved in South India can be useful to understanding the process of transformation of melodies and musical concepts, resulting from the transference of traditions from one culture to another. It may also help us to take a fresh look at the role and conception of geographical boundaries in musical cultures.

The St. Thomas Christians

According to tradition, St. Thomas the Apostle arrived in Kerala, on the southwest coast of India, in the middle of the first century AD; he preached the new "way" (*māṛggam*), established communities (*paḷḷi*), and died a martyr at Chennai (Madras).[1] The small community was strengthened by the immigration of Christians from Persia in the fourth century. From the middle of the fifth century onwards there is historical evidence for the Indian church receiving bishops from Persia.[2] When the Portuguese arrived in Kochi, Kerala, in 1502, they were pleasantly surprised to find a prosperous community of Christians.[3] However, their initial excitement faded soon when the missionaries realized that the local Christians followed a different litur-

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gy in a language that was not Latin and, more significantly, professed allegiance to the Chaldean Patriarch and received bishops from the Chaldean Church. The term "Chaldean" refers to the ancient region in southern Babylonia along the Euphrates River and the Persian Gulf, and to Christian communities in that region known variously as Chaldean Church, Persian Church, or Babylonian Church. Rome considered the Chaldean Church to be "Nestorian," i. e., followers of Nestorius, who was Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431. The very name of Nestorius evoked strong negative reactions in the missionaries because the Roman Catholic Church had condemned Nestorianism as a heresy.[4] Since the St. Thomas Christians were using the liturgy of the Chaldean Church, the missionaries began to look at them as heretics. Consequently, they thought it their mission to purge the local Christians of Nestorianism and bring them to the "true" faith of the Catholic Church. The missionaries tried to persuade the local Christians to become Roman Catholics.

In the course of history, conflicts of ideologies and allegiances led to several divisions among the St. Thomas Christians, often as a response to hegemonic interference from churches outside India. As a result, there are at present seven independent churches among the St. Thomas Christians: the Syro-Malabar Church (in union with Rome), the Assyrian Church of the East (Nestorian Church), the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, the Independent Jacobite Church of Thozhiyoor, the Syro-Malankara Church (in union with Rome), and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church.[5]

A common feature among these churches is the use of the Syriac language in liturgy. Syriac is a form of Aramaic (from "Aram," the biblical name for Syria) that Jesus and his disciples spoke. By the fifth century, Syriac differentiated itself into East Syriac and West Syriac.[6] Among the seven Syriac churches in South India, the Syro-Malabar Church and the Assyrian Church of the East follow the Chaldean liturgy in East Syriac; the other five churches follow the Antiochean liturgy in West Syriac.[7] The present study focuses on a section of the liturgical music repertoire of the latter group, here collectively referred to as Syrian Orthodox churches.[8]

History of the Syrian Orthodox Churches

The identity of the Syrian Orthodox churches as separate entities begins in 1653 when the first of several divisions took place among the St. Thomas Christians. The first division was the result of a strained relationship between the Portuguese missionaries and the St. Thomas Christians who, until 1599, were under the spiritual leadership of the Chaldean Patriarch. Acting on behalf of the Pope and the King of Portugal, the Portuguese missionaries tried

to take command of the social, liturgical, and ecclesiastical life of the local Christians. A section of the St. Thomas Christians sided with the missionaries, but the majority vehemently opposed the attempts of Latinization. They took an oath in 1653, saying that they would not subject themselves to the Jesuit prelates who represented Rome. Soon after, they appealed to the Eastern patriarchs of Antioch, Babylon, and Alexandria for assistance in the apostolic succession. The Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch responded to the request by sending to Kerala Mar Gregorios, the Jacobite bishop of Jerusalem. Bishop Gregorios' visit in 1665 became the first step in the history of the relationship between Indian Christians and the Jacobite Church of Antioch. After the death of Mar Gregorios in 1671, the Antiochean connection continued, but without any juridical authority of the Patriarch over the dissident group, who eventually came to be known by such various names as People of *puthankūṛ* (Malayalam, "people of new allegiance"), Jacobites, or Syrian Orthodox. In 1751 the Patriarch of Antioch sent Mar Baselios, Mar Gregorios, Ramban John, and two other clerics to Kerala with a letter claiming juridical supremacy over the people of new allegiance. This mission was only partially successful. Finally, the Patriarch himself, Peter III, visited Kerala in 1876 and convened a synod at Mulanthuruthy, near Kochi. During the Synod he established his juridical supremacy over the people of new allegiance. However, conflicting claims of affiliation and allegiances led to more divisions in the subsequent centuries.

Antiochean Liturgy in South India

The introduction of the Antiochean liturgy in South India was a slow and gradual process that took more than a century, from the 1750s to the 1860s.[9] Although Bishop Gregorios of Jerusalem celebrated liturgy in the Antiochean rite during his stay in Kerala (1665–71), the circumstances were not congenial enough for him to impose the rite and its doctrinal tenets on the St. Thomas Christians who, by then, were celebrating mass and the sacraments in a modified Chaldean rite under the supervision of the Portuguese missionaries. However, the Bishop sowed seeds of contempt among the local Christians against the "idolatrous Romans" and those among the St. Thomas Christians "who came under the influence of the wicked Kings and Queens of Portugal" (Baselios [1973] 1997:101).

A significant phase in the history of the Antiochean liturgy in Kerala started with the arrival of Bishop Baselios and his entourage, in 1751. As a way of forging a separate identity and thereby gaining control over the people of new allegiance, the Bishop and his companions introduced the different *anaphoras* (Eucharistic prayer) of the Antiochean rite. They do not seem to have attempted a complete replacement of the Chaldean liturgical tradition

with that of the Antiochean tradition, and consequently, for more than a century the Antiochean and Chaldean liturgies co-existed side by side.

In 1847 Joachim Cyril, another Antiochean bishop, arrived in Kerala and stayed until 1874. He took upon himself the mission of a complete transition from the Chaldean to the Antiochean liturgy. He replaced the East Syriac script with the West Syriac (Antiochean) script. In 1876 Patriarch Peter III completed the final stages of the transition during his visitation to the churches brought under his juridical power.

Until the 1960s, the Syrian Orthodox churches celebrated the liturgy in Syriac. The process of vernacularization started in the early 1960s. The mass was translated first into Malayalam, the language of Kerala, where most Syrian Orthodox Christians live. A Tamil translation of the missal and prayers for a few other occasions was printed in 1965 for the use of the communities in Tamil Nadu. Also, a Kannada edition of the missal for use in the Karnataka area was published in 1980. Currently, mass and Offices are celebrated both in Syriac and Malayalam in seminaries and religious formation houses in Kerala. The communities in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka use mostly the vernacular version of these texts. The music examples discussed in this chapter in connection with the oktoēchos are from the Malayalam edition of the Syriac texts.

The Oktoēchos in Syria

A distinguishing feature of the music repertory of the Antiochean rite is the system of classifying melodies into eight categories, known by the Greek name oktoēchos ("eight voices"). According to Aelred Cody, the system originated in the Greco-Syriac linguistic frontier in Syria and Palestine as part of "a musical culture shared largely by both Hellenistic and Aramean Christians" (Cody 1982:106). After extensive research on the early history of oktoēchos in Syria, Cody concluded that "[t]here is really no evidence for the existence of an octoechos in any sense before the eighth century, or perhaps the seventh" (102). In doing so, Cody disqualified the widely-held belief that Severus of Antioch (ca. 465–538) was the progenitor of oktoēchos, and that "the musical system of eight modes or the Byzantine liturgical arrangements of texts by mode or both were already in use in Antioch in the early sixth century" (91).

The Oktoēchos in South India

The historiography of the Antiochean liturgical music tradition in India is made difficult because of the paucity of documentary evidence. The process of introducing the music might have been slower than that of introduc-

ing the liturgical texts and theological tenets. In all probability, people continued to sing the Antiochean chants using the Chaldean melodies that were familiar to them. Both West Syriac and East Syriac liturgical chants followed the same Syriac prosody.

The vast liturgical music repertory of the Antiochean rite may be divided into two main categories: chants that fall under the system of eight classes of melodies (oktoēchos), and those that have only a single melody. The chants of the Office and mass belong to the first category, and the chants of the Holy Week and other special occasions belong to the second category. The focus of this study will be on the chants in the first category.

The system of singing the same text in eight different melodies in an eight-week cycle is referred to variously as *eṭṭuniṛam* (Malayalam, "eight colors"), *eṭṭurāgam* ("eight rāgams"), oktoēchos (Greek, "eight voices"), and *eqāṛā* (Syriac, "root," "origin"). The first two are indigenous terms in Malayalam and are the most common. The term eṭṭuniṛam is a combination of two words, *eṭṭu,* "eight." and niṛam, "color." Semantically similar to the first, the second term combines the Malayalam word eṭṭu with the Sanskrit word rāg, which also means "color." While referring to a particular color, both terms take the number as an adjectival prefix, as in *onnām niṛam* ("first color") and *onnām rāgam,* etc. Syntactically, both niṛam and rāgam should have a plural suffix in Malayalam, *ngaḷ,* as in *eṭṭuniṛangaḷ* or *eṭṭurāgangaḷ.* However, in this case, people seem to ignore the syntactic rule in favor of easy utterance in every day speech.

The clergy and the educated laity of the Orthodox churches are familiar with the borrowed terms, oktoēchos and eqāṛā. Nonetheless, these terms are not part of the common parlance. Between the two, eqāṛā seems to be preferred, probably because of the Syriac origin of the word. However, my informants could not say how or when these terms came to be used in Kerala.

The transference of a musical tradition from one culture to another may entail transformation of the underlying musical concepts. In retrospect, the wisdom of the local Christians in avoiding a direct translation of the foreign terms into the local language is commendable. The Malayalam translation of oktoēchos and eqāṛā, respectively as *eṭṭuśabdangaḷ* ("eight sounds" or "eight voices") and *eṭṭuwērukaḷ* ("eight roots") would not have satisfactorily conveyed the musical connotations.[10] Instead of adopting those terms into the language, they adapted the indigenous terms, niṛam and rāgam.

The equivalence of the two words, niṛam and rāgam, deserves discussion. In common parlance in Malayalam, both words are polysemic. The word niṛam is used primarily to denote the perceptual phenomenon of color. Figuratively, it is used to mean the nature or character of an individual. For example, the phrase *tani niṛam* (literally, "one's own color") refers not to

the color of the skin, but to a person's true character. In a different context, niṟam may connote a particular character in a drama. For instance, in kathakaḷi (the dance drama of Kerala), the faces of noble, virtuous, and heroic characters are painted green, and those of the demonic and mean-spirited characters are painted black. Therefore, *paccạ niṟam* ("green color") and *kari niṟam* ("black color") are used as technical terms to refer to the respective characters in the drama. What is significant here is that in the normal usage niṟam does not have musical connotations.

The word rāgam comes from the Sanskrit root *ranj,* which primarily means "color." Among the other meanings of ranj are "to appease," "to conciliate," etc. The word is used in literary Malayalam with its primary and secondary meanings. The Sanskrit-English Dictionary of P. K. Gode and C. G. Karve lists twenty meanings for the word rāg; the first three are related to color, the fourth is related to different forms of love and affection, and the musical connotations are listed as ninth and tenth in the list (Gode and Karve 1959:1333). In Malayalam, rāgam is used for all three levels of meaning as color, passionate love,[11] and music.

In the context of the Orthodox liturgy both the laity and the clergy use niṟam and rāgam interchangeably to refer to a comprehensive and multidimensional psycho-acoustical experience of music (i.e., text, melody, and human voice) along with the affective elements associated with that experience.[12] However, since rāgam has a different set of connotations in the Sanskrit theory and practice of Indian classical music, I shall avoid using rāgam interchangeably with niṟam in this study. I shall use Color (with an upper case C) and niṟam interchangeably. While referring to the system of classification of Colors in general, I shall use the term eṭṭuniṟam.

Eight Colors and the Eight-Week Cycle

As a system, eṭṭuniṟam may be considered a cyclic genre, because it is performed in a cycle of eight weeks. The same verbal text is sung in eight different ways within the span of eight-week cycles within the liturgical year. The prescription of Colors for the days of the week as well as for the eight-week cycle is called the eqāṟā canon. The eight Colors are organized into two sets of four pairs each in the following manner: 1–5, 2–6, 3–7, 4–8 and 5–1, 6–2, 7–3, 8–4. One Color is prescribed for each day, and one pair of Colors for each week in serial order. A twenty-four hour liturgical day begins with the evening prayer (*ṟamśo*) and ends with the afternoon prayer on the following day. Thus, the week of Color 1 begins with ṟamśo on Saturday evening (i.e., ṟamśo of Sunday); Color 1 will continue in all the Offices until Sunday afternoon. Color 5 will start with evening prayer on Sunday (i.e., ṟamśo of Monday), and so on. Table 1 shows the distribution of Colors in an eight-week cycle.

Table 1. The order of Colors in eight weeks.

Week 1.

Sunday	Color 1	Monday	Color 5
Tuesday	Color 1	Wednesday	Color 5
Thursday	Color 1	Friday	Color 5
Saturday	Color 1		

Week 2.

Sunday	Color 2	Monday	Color 6
Tuesday	Color 2	Wednesday	Color 6
Thursday	Color 2	Friday	Color 6
Saturday	Color 2		

Week 3.

Sunday	Color 3	Monday	Color 7
Tuesday	Color 3	Wednesday	Color 7
Thursday	Color 3	Friday	Color 7
Saturday	Color 3		

Week 4.

Sunday	Color 4	Monday	Color 8
Tuesday	Color 4	Wednesday	Color 8
Thursday	Color 4	Friday	Color 8
Saturday	Color 4		

Week 5.

Sunday	Color 5	Monday	Color 1
Tuesday	Color 5	Wednesday	Color 1
Thursday	Color 5	Friday	Color 1
Saturday	Color 5		

Table 1 (cont.)

Week 6.

Sunday	Color 6	Monday	Color 2
Tuesday	Color 6	Wednesday	Color 2
Thursday	Color 6	Friday	Color 2
Saturday	Color 6		

Week 7.

Sunday	Color 7	Monday	Color 3
Tuesday	Color 7	Wednesday	Color 3
Thursday	Color 7	Friday	Color 3
Saturday	Color 7		

Week 8.

Sunday	Color 8	Monday	Color 4
Tuesday	Color 8	Wednesday	Color 4
Thursday	Color 8	Friday	Color 4
Saturday	Color 8		

Quqlyōn, a Cyclic Genre

The practice of eṭṭuniram is associated with another cyclic genre known as *quqlyōn* (Greek, "circle"). A quqlyōn consists of four categories of chants in the following order (see Table 2): *peṭgōmō* (Syriac, "word," "verse"), *ekbo* (Syriac, "foot," "base"), *qōlō* (Syriac, "song"), and *bōwuṭō* (Syriac, "petition"). All four sections of a quqlyōn are bound by a single theme and are sung in the same Color, i.e., the Color of the day. The theme of the cycle varies according to the liturgical occasions. Most common themes are praise and supplication to the Blessed Virgin, Saints, or commemoration of the dead. The first section, peṭgōmō, is also known as quqlyōn. The text, which alludes to the theme of the cycle, consists of one or two verses from the sacred scripture. The phrase "hallelujah" is interpolated in the middle of the text. Peṭgōmō is concluded with the Trinitarian doxology, *śubho l'abo w'l'abro w'al ṛuho qadiśo* (Syriac, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit"). The phrase, *bāṛekmōṛ* (Syriac, "have mercy O Lord") often occurs as a prefix to the doxology. The second section, ekbo, is a short chant

of a single strophe, which introduces the theme of the cycle. Ekbo is con-
cluded with the phrase, *stauman kalōs quṛiyelaison* (Greek, "[let us] stand
properly; Lord have mercy"). The qōlō forms the third and the most impor-
tant part of the cycle. A qōlō is a relatively long chant, consisting of many
stanzas, all in the same poetic meter. The final stanza is concluded with the
phrase *moṛiōṛāhēm alain w'ādāṛayn* (Syriac, "Lord have mercy on us and
help us"). This is followed by a prayer in prose; it is intoned in a recitative
style, using two or three pitches. The concluding section of the cycle is a
bōwuṭō, a relatively long chant of supplication. After the completion of a
cycle, as time permits, another cycle in a different theme may begin with a
new peṭgōmō.

Table 2. The structure of a quqlyōn.

I	II	III	IV
peṭgōmō	Ekbo	qōlō	bōwuṭō
(Doxology)		(Prayer)	

The Concept of Niṛam

It may be easier to understand Color as a musical concept by stating first
what it is not. A Color is not a fixed melody. A single Color can manifest it-
self in many melodies. The ontology of Color is a matter of coexistence of
text and melody in vocal performance by an individual or a congregation.
Color does not exist separately in a particular text or exhaust itself in a specific
melody, but rather expresses itself in the melodious execution of a text. Color
is a musical tool to enhance the text. Different Colors embellish the same
text differently. Therefore, the Colors taken together may be considered a
vocal music genre.

Although a Color is not a fixed melody, there are melodic features that
are associated with certain Colors. The students encode those features as
characteristic elements of those Colors. For instance, the chants in Colors 2
and 6 often have an ascending cadence.

A Color is not a specific scale either. In the understanding of Color the
primary focus is not on the configurations of pitches or the ordering of in-
tervals, but on the aggregate effect that melody and text generate. Different
Colors may employ the same notes. In a scale-melody continuum, Color leans
more toward melody than scale. This is evident in the learning process of
Colors. The pedagogy emphasizes the memorizing of several melodies in the
same Color, rather than learning pitch configurations or characteristic phrases
as in the pedagogy of Indian art music.

Table 3. The pitches used in each of the eight Colors in three chants. Letters in bold type represent the final note on which melody ends; letters in lower case represent notes below middle C.

	Chant 1	Chant 2	Chant 3
Color 1	**C** D E F G	a **D** E F G	**C** D E F G
Color 2	a **C** D E F G	**D** E F# G A	**C** D E F G
Color 3	C **D** E F G	**E** F G A	**C** D E F G
Color 4	**E** F G A Bb	**F** G A Bb	**E** F G A Bb
Color 5	C **D** E F	C **D** E F G	C **D** E F G
Color 6	D E F **G**	D E F **G**	D E **F**
Color 7	**D** E F G	E F **G**	**D** E F G
Color 8	D E F **G**	D E F **G** A	D E F **G**

Although scalar characteristics are not considered decisive factors in discerning the Color, the analysis of melodies shows that most Colors have enough scalar features in common to merit discussion. Table 3 provides a general idea about the number of pitches, nature of the intervals, and relative importance of notes in three chants. Music Figures 1 and 2 show transcriptions in Western staff notation of the chants in column 1 and 2 in the Table (see note on transcription). These chants were sung by one of my principal informants, Fr. M. P. George from the Syrian Orthodox Church. Fr. M. P. George is professor of music and theology at the Syrian Orthodox Seminary at Kottayam, in Kerala. The singing took place during our recorded interviews conducted at his residence on 16 August 2000. Figure 1 consists of the eight Colors of a quqlyōn (in Malayalam) in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Figure 2 shows the Trinitarian doxology (in Syriac) in eight Colors. The doxology appears often as a concluding formula for various chants. It has one fixed melody for each of the eight Colors. The Color of the doxology takes the Color of the day; i. e., if the Color of the day is no. 1, then the doxology for various chants on that day will be sung in the melody ascribed to Color 1 of the doxology. The letters in bold type in the table represent the final note on which the melody ends. In most cases, the final is also the most emphasized note in the melody and in many cases the note on which the medial cadences end. Letters in lower case in the table represent notes below middle C.

Most melodies are trichordal, tetrachordal, or pentachordal, meaning that

Figure 1. Quqlyōn of the Blessed Virgin in eight Colors. This and the following example were sung by Fr. M. P. George. Musical transcriptions are by the author.

Color 1. Half note = c. 69

Ni nnā ḷ stu ti yo ṭu rā ja ma ka ḷ ha - lle - - lu ya -

u ha lle lu - ya ni n wa la mā y rā ja bhā mi ni yum

Color 2. Half note = c. 66

Ni nnā ḷ stu ti yo ṭu rā - ja ma ka ḷ - - - ha - lle lu - ya

ni n wa la mā y rā ja bhā - mi ni yum

Color 3. Half note = c. 69

Ni nnā ḷ stu ti yo ṭu rā ja ma ka ḷ hā lle lu - - - ya

ni n wa la mā y rā ja bhā - mi ni yum

Color 4. Half note = 66

Ni nnā ḷ stu ti yo ṭu rā - ja ma ka ḷ ha lle lu - ya

ni n wa la mā y rā ja bhā - mi ni yum

they employ three, four, or five pitches. Melodies that employ a full octave are very rare. Even when a melody uses five pitches, it may not be called pentatonic, because the distribution of the five pitches lacks the reference to an octave.

As is seen in Table 3, various Colors may share the same pitches, yet differ from each other in many other aspects. For example, Colors 1, 2, 3, and 5 in

Figure 1 (cont.)

column 4 (chant 3) employ the same number and nature of notes, C-D-E-F-G, but differ in other aspects such as the relative importance of notes. Colors 1 and 2 have D as final, whereas the final in Colors 3 and 5 is E. Colors 1 and 2 employ the same pitches and have the same final, yet the overall impression the melodies create is different. The pitches D-E-F#-G-A in Color 2 in Figure 2 are specific to this particular rendition and therefore may be an exception to the general trend. A rendition of the doxology in Color 2 by another principal informant, Fr. James Chitteth (the choir leader and professor of theology at the Malankara Orthodox Seminary at Vettikkal, Kerala) does not have the major third. Colors 3 and 5 are unique because of the use of the minor second in the trichord E-F-G. Colors 4 and 8 stand out among oth-

Figure 2. The Trinitarian doxology in eight Colors.

ers because of the use of the major tetrachord F-G-A-Bb (Color 4) and major trichord F-G-A (Color 8).

Color 3 deserves special mention. Music professors in the seminaries observed that Color 3 is the most popular among the students. This is the Color that students master first. The melodies in this Color have an instant

appeal to students. The professors could not think of a particular reason for this special phenomenon. In retrospect, I realize that my own experience was not different from that of the students in the seminary. The melody in Color 3 touched me instantly as I heard it for the first time from M. P. George. The particular use of the trichord E-F-G reminded me strongly of the melodic contours as well as the overall feeling in rāg Bhairavi in Hindustani music.[13]

The rhythmic aspect of melodies in each Color often depends on the poetic meter of the text. The pedagogy does not emphasize the mastering of any rhythmic pattern as part of learning the chants in various Colors. The proper articulation of the text seems to be the main concern. Therefore, rhythm or meter is not part of the discussion or the determination of the Color of a melody. The lack of emphasis on rhythm in the recognition of Color does not mean that specific metric patterns are totally absent in the melodies. There are melodies that have a set meter or certain segments of the melody that have a definite metric structure.

Although rhythm is not a determining factor in Color, there are rhythmic features that are associated with certain Colors. For example, melodies in Color 8 generally have a fast tempo. During the interviews, M. P. George and James Chitteth spoke jokingly about the popularity of Color 8 among the young seminarians. Because of the faster pace of the melodies in Color 8, the Office takes a few minutes less. Color 8 is more appealing to students, they said, especially during the period of Lent, which also happens to be the hottest time in Kerala. Students are generally tired on those days because of fasting and because of the number of genuflections during each Office.[14] Therefore, they are happy to get out of the chapel earlier, even if it is just by a few minutes.

Beyond scale, melody, and rhythm, there is yet another aspect that is closely associated with the concept of Color; it is the emotive effect that each Color generates, designated in Malayalam as *bhāwam*. The word bhāwam comes from the Sanskrit root *bhāw*, meaning "state of being," "feeling," "emotion," etc. Different Colors generate different emotional states. The attribution of emotional states to individual Colors may often be arbitrary, but all the informants agreed on this functional aspect of Colors. What is significant here is that the emotive elements are considered not extraneous or extramusical, but as integral to the concept of Color. Fr. Prince Kolady, a member of the Independent Church of Thozhiyoor, put it succinctly using the analogy of flowers in the following words: "As each [kind] of flower has its own scent, so does each Color have its own bhāwam" (p.c., translated by the author).

The following description of Colors in connection with emotive states is based on the interview with M. P. George and James Chitteth. Although

Colors 1 and 2 have minor scales, the mood of the melodies in these Colors is generally one of happiness. Color 3 creates a sense of pathos. The mood of Color 7 is similar to that of Color 3. Colors 4 and 8 are joyful. M. P. George equated the mood of Color 5 to repulsion (*bībhalsam*), but James Chitteth thought the mood of Color 5 was one of a contrite soul. Color 6 best express-es the state of compunction (*anutāpam*), the feelings of a repentant sinner seeking the mercy (*karuṇa*) of God. Colors 5 and 6 are often used for funer-al services.

To summarize this part of the discussion, niṟam is a dynamic concept in the sense that it exists not in a particular scale or exclusively in a specific melody, but in the shared memory of many melodies and their actual per-formances. From sharing the experiences of informants and students at the seminaries and from analyzing my own experience of learning niṟam, I real-ize that the first response a niṟam evokes in a practitioner is the memory of favorite chants in that niṟam. These melodies vary slightly from individual to individual and from group to group. The melodies are deemed not as defini-tive versions of a Color, but as examples of various possibilities, thereby giv-ing the opportunity for each Color and its melodies to have a history of its own.

Taken together, the Colors belong to both a classificatory and genera-tive model, and are a closed and open-ended system at the same time. Col-ors function similar to rāg as a basis for composition-improvisation (a simul-taneous process rather than sequential as composition and improvisation). The idea of a particular Color is used as a guide for realizing old and new chant texts in singing. As a classificatory model, the number of Colors is restricted to eight, but as a generative model, the number of melodies in each Color is unlimited.

The Pairing of Colors

The pedagogy of Colors does not emphasize the pairing of Colors as 1–5, 2–6, etc. Rather, each Color is treated as an individual entity and not in relation to its respective pair. During my interviews, I was curious to know if the informants were aware of any specific reasons, musical or otherwise, for the practice of pairing the Colors. They did not seem to be aware of any such reason. Nobody seemed to have challenged the conventional practice either. The oft-repeated answer was that it is part of the tradition of the Or-thodox churches in the Middle East or "this is the way it has always been." The idea of an authentic-plagal relationship that scholars refer to in their writings on the oktoēchos of the Syrian Orthodox churches outside India (see Cody 1982:108, n.32; Husmann and Jeffery 2001:860; Kuckertz 1969:63) did not come up during my conversations about eṭṭuniṟam. Analysis of the mel-

odies transcribed in the music examples in this article as well as those that were not transcribed does not show any indication of a relationship between the pairs based on higher-lower ambitus of melodies. Informants do recognize the presence of major-minor tetrachords in Colors, but they do not consider it a reason for the pairing.

There are a few instances where a pair of Colors shows common characteristics. Melodies in Colors 2 and 6 generally have an ascending melodic cadence at the end of strophes; Colors 4 and 8 have a common scalar feature, namely, intervals that are characteristic of major tetrachord (F-G-A-Bb in Color 4) or major trichord (F-G-A in Color 8); and Colors 3 and 7 share a similar mood of pathos. However, it would require analysis of far greater number of melodies to arrive at a substantial explanation, if there is any, for the pairing of Colors.

Learning and Transmission

The knowledge of eṭṭuniṟam is transmitted orally in the controlled setting of the teacher-student relationship. Seminaries and religious formation houses are the most important centers of learning. The learning of eṭṭuniṟam is part of the priestly training in the Orthodox churches; even the musically unskilled students are expected to know the basic ideas of the system.

The music professors at the seminaries are the most important agents of transmission of the tradition. Although the professors are musically educated, the use of notation, Indian or Western, as an aid to teaching is not in vogue. The pedagogy employs mostly a method of learning by rote through trial and error. The students learn sample melodies in each Color to get a general idea of that particular Color. The celebration of the Office and mass also provides occasions to practice the melodies that students learn from their teachers.

Niṟam and Rāg: A Comparison

The practitioners of eṭṭuniṟam are well aware of the use of the term rāg in the context of Indian art music. A few of them have even received training in South Indian classical music. Yet, they use niṟam and rāg interchangeably. Therefore, a comparison of niṟam with the concept of rāg (rāga, rāgam) in Indian art music may be relevant at this point.

(i) Etymologically, both terms refer primarily to the perceptual phenomena of color. Musical connotations belong only to a secondary level of meaning.

(ii) In the context of music, both terms refer to melodic and musical structures along with the aesthetic experience generated by the performance of the music.

(iii) Both terms share another common characteristic, namely, indescribability, i. e., they mean more than what can be described in words, and yet the meaning is easily understood by the practitioners based on a general consensus arrived after years of exposure and experience.

(iv) The association with particular emotional states is another common feature of niṛam and rāg. The word bhāwam (bhāw) is used in the theory of both to describe their emotive effects. In both cases, the feelings associated with each are described in broad categories, and are often arbitrary.

(v) Both niṛam and rāg have extra-musical associations with time and seasons of the year. The eqāṛā canon, for example, prescribes specific Colors for the days of the week, seasons in the liturgical year, and special occasions such as marriage and funeral services. Likewise, certain rāgs in Indian music are associated with specific times of the day or night, and seasons of the year.

(vi) Both niṛam and rāg follow a similar process of transmission in the controlled setting of teacher-student relationship.

(vii) The exclusion of rhythmic aspects in their conceptualization is yet another similarity. Rhythm of meter is not a factor in the determination of either niṛam or rāg. In Indian classical music theory, the metric cycle, known as tāl (tāla, tāḷam), is an independent system that has a theoretical framework of its own. Metrical aspects are not determining factors in the description of rāg. Similarly, the chant texts of eṭṭuniṛam are composed in accordance with the elaborate rules of Syriac prosody. However, strict adherence to the prosody is not a determining factor in the musical realization of the texts, and the rhythmic aspects are not significant in the understanding of niṛam as a concept.

(viii) Albeit for different reasons, both terms have found a place in theatrical language. In kathakaḷi of Kerala, niṛam is associated with different kinds of characters in the drama. Similar usage is found in the early literature on rāg. *Bṛhaddeśi,* the Sanskrit treatise on music from the late first millennium composed by Matanga, "associates each rāg with a particular stage character or situation: the 'munificent hero,' 'the hero who enters hunting,' 'one in violent grief,' and there is even a rāg for the stage manager (*sūtradhāra*), who often appears on stage in his own person in Sanskrit drama" (Widdess 1989:74).

Beyond these similarities, there are marked differences in the theory and practice of niṛam and rāg.

(i) The attribution of musical connotations to the Malayalam word niṛam was an arbitrary choice of the Orthodox Christians in South India, sometime after the 1750s. Outside those communities, the term has no musical meaning. Rāg, on the other hand, enjoys much broader appeal as a musical term.

(ii) Niṟam is text-bound; that is, we cannot think of niṟam as existing outside the chant texts. For that reason, one cannot imagine an instrumental version of a niṟam. This is not so with rāg. A rāg can be performed with or without text, using a musical instrument or using human voice as an instrument singing solfege or even vocables.

(iii) The conventional theory of rāg prescribes a minimum of five pitches within an octave. Such prescriptions are absent and irrelevant in the case of niṟam because many melodies employ only three or four pitches, and that too without reference to an octave.

(iv) In the classification of rāg, the pitch material is sometimes used to differentiate one rāg or family of rāgs from the other. In the case of niṟam, pitch material is not used for classificatory purposes.

(v) The performance context is another differentiating factor. Niṟam is performed only within the context of communal worship. Other than for pedagogical purposes, niṟam is not practiced outside the context of liturgy. There are no such restrictions in the performance of rāg. Anybody can perform rāg anywhere, at any time. Music historians often trace the development of Indian art music to the chanting of the Vedas, especially the Samaveda. However, over the course of time, the performance contexts of rāg evolved from worship to theater, and to other venues of daily life.

(vi) The purpose of niṟam is the enhancement of chant text and the avoidance of the boredom which would ensue from singing the same text and melody every day of the week. There is an aesthetic aspect of niṟam, since singers regard certain Colors as pretty, etc., but entertainment or enjoyment of music per se, outside the context of worship, is not among the uses of niṟam. A rāg, on the other hand, is multipurpose. It can be performed for meditation, for ritual worship, or for pure entertainment.

(vii) Although both niṟam and rāg have extra-musical associations to time and seasons, the strictness with which performers adhere to those conventional rules vary. In the case of niṟam, the prescription of different Colors for different days is strictly followed, whereas in the case of rāg, individual performers, at least in the South, may or may not follow the convention of rāg-time theory. Thus, a South Indian musician may choose to perform a morning rāg in the afternoon and vice versa. Generally, performers in the North Indian tradition are relatively more inclined toward the rāg-time convention than their counterparts in the South Indian tradition (see Powers 1970:14).

(viii) Pedagogy is another area in which niṟam and rāg differ. Usually, the learning of a rāg begins with acquainting oneself with the pitches in the scale, the ascending and descending patterns (*ārōh* and *avarōh*), the relative importance of pitches within the scale (*vādi, samvādi, anuvādi,* etc.), and characteristic melodic phrases. All these aspects are deemed as prepa-

ration to the learning of the compositions in that particular rāg. The peda-
gogy of niṛam is much simpler. The student learns a few sample chants in a
niṛam in order to get a feel for that particular niṛam.

This comparison shows that there are almost as many similarities as dif-
ferences between the two concepts. What is significant here is the multi-
dimensional approach to niṛam, as opposed to associating a specific scale
with a particular Color. This non-scalar approach to niṛam as a concept and
as a classificatory model makes it closer to the pre-sixteenth century under-
standing of rāg. Reviewing the literature on rāg, Harold Powers writes, "[a]s
a rubric for melodic classification in Indian music, scale-type can be traced
with certainty only back to the sixteenth century, when the ancestors of the
present systems for classification made their appearance" (Powers 1970:3).
The comparison also shows eṭṭuniṛam as an example of a non-classical tradi-
tion that has explicit theory (as opposed to implicit theory in many folk music
traditions), thereby satisfying many a criterion of *śāstra,* the Sanskrit term
for a systematic body of knowledge.[15]

Oktoēchos and Eṭṭuniṛam

Within the Antiochean liturgy there are two different musical traditions,
named after two cities: Mosul in Iraq and Turabdin in Turkey. Both traditions
are represented in Kerala (George 1993:28). Considering Kottayam, in cen-
tral Kerala, as the dividing line, the churches in the regions north of Kottayam
follow the Turabdin tradition, and those in the south follow the Mosul tradi-
tion. The source of the difference in the styles depends on the origin of the
visiting bishops and priests from the Middle East—Jerusalem, Iraq, Turkey,
and other areas in the Middle East—and the extent of their stay in Kerala.
The range of differences varies from subtle changes in the pattern of vocal-
ization and ornamentation of melodies to the use of a completely different
melody for a chant text. It would require an analysis of several renditions from
each region to arrive at any definite conclusions about the two different styles.

The extent to which the melodies of the oktoēchos have undergone
transformation in the Indian context is another area that requires further
exploration. Fr. Mathew Chempothinal, a member of the Syro-Malankara
Church, observed that within the Syrian Orthodox churches in Kerala, the
melodies of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church show greater fidelity to
the Syrian tradition, and the melodies of the Syrian Orthodox and Syro-Ma-
lankara churches show greater influence from the local musical styles of
Kerala (Chempothinal 1980:86). In general, it is difficult to make general
comments about style at this point. I have noticed, however, that there is a
marked difference in the vocal inflection between the older priests and the

younger seminarians. The melodic style of the older priests sounds very Middle-Eastern, while the influence of the vernacular (Malayalam) is predominant in the vocal inflection of young seminarians. Further research is needed on this subject.

As it exists today, eṭṭuniṟam is restricted to particular communities of Orthodox Christians in specific regions of India. Yet, it is the result of musical mobility between cultures within Asia without *en masse* migrations; music traveled with a handful of religious leaders who visited India. From what is known, this musical mobility was a one-way traffic from the Middle East to South India that took place in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and not the other way around. It remains to be explored if these agents of transmission who brought the Antiochean liturgy and its music to South India took anything musical or otherwise back to their mother churches in the Middle East.

Conclusion

As a system of music, eṭṭuniṟam consists of a body of knowledge that is closely tied to ritual and worship, using Syriac language and prosody as its medium. It was transported from the Middle East to India, transformed into local idioms and languages, and transmitted mostly orally in the controlled setting of teacher-student relationship in the seminaries and religious formation houses, thereby forming an unbroken tradition for over a century and a half. There is every reason to believe that the tradition will continue in the foreseeable future because of the value attached to the music and its history in the continuous formation, preservation, and assertion of individual and communal identities as Orthodox Christians in the religiously pluralistic society of India.

Eṭṭuniṟam is an example of the musical proximity of otherwise distant regions and diverse cultures that do not share contemporary history. The music that is part of the daily experience of a particular group of people in a specific location may have far-reaching geographical and cultural connections, even when those connections are not part of the daily discourse. Such a proximity may prompt us to take a much broader and less definitive approach to the locus of music, and to the imagination and imaging of boundaries in local, regional, and even national musics.

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Note on Transcription

For better communicability with readers outside the Indian tradition, I have used Western staff notation to transcribe the melodies. The practitioners of this music in India do not use notation system, Western or Indian, either for pedagogy or for performance. The transcription is not intended to be prescriptive, nor does it represent a definitive version of the melody; it provides only a general idea of the melodic and rhythmic contours. Certain crucial elements such as the dynamic nuances, varying emphasis on syllables, and the particular vocal inflection that varies from performer to performer are among the unique features that are not indicated here. Therefore, the life of the melody in actual performance is far from what one might envision by looking at the transcription. The metronome markings provide a general sense of the tempo. Sometimes, the tempo varies slightly within the course of the melody. The flat or sharp signs in the beginning of a stave are not indented as key signatures, but merely indicate the pitch of the respective notes. In most cases, the melody is transcribed in the original pitch of the performance. However, in certain cases, the pitch is raised or lowered by a half to a full tone in order to minimize the use of accidentals. All melodies transcribed in this study were recorded during my interviews with the informants. The pitch register of the melody in an actual performance in the liturgical context might vary slightly. During the liturgy, the choir leader places the melody in a pitch register that he or she thinks is comfortable for the community.

Notes

1. For a brief survey of the history of Christianity in India, see Palackal (1995:11–29); for detailed information on the history of the St. Thomas Christians, see Mundadan (1970, [1984] 1989) and Tisserant (1957).

2. Cardinal Tisserant (1957:10) writes: "Indian Christianity was definitely connected with the see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon only about A.D. 450, at a time when the Mesopotamian, also called the Persian, Church was itself being strongly established and was a well-knit unit."

3. Vasco de Gama (ca. 1469–1524) visited India three times. During his first voyage in 1498, he landed in Kozhikkode, in the northern part of Kerala. On his second trip in 1502, he arrived in Kochi. His final trip was in 1524. He died in Kochi and was buried there.

4. Nestorianism is the belief that there are two natures and two distinct persons in Christ, the human and divine. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin Mary can be called only "Christotokos" (bearer of Christ) and not "theotokos" (bearer of God). In 431 the Council of Ephesus under the leadership of Cyril of Alexandria condemned this heresy. Nestorius was deposed and exiled first to a monastery in Antioch and then to the desert in Egypt in 435, where he died around 451. A century later, the Chaldean Church honored Nestorius as a saint.

5. For information on each of these churches, see *Indian Christian Directory* (2000).

6. For more information on Syriac language and liturgies, see Palackal (2002).

7. The center of Antiochean liturgy (Antioch) was within the boundaries of the Roman Empire. The Chaldean liturgy developed in the Persian Empire with Edessa (present-day Urfa in south-eastern Turkey) as its center. Theologically, the Antiochean rite is Monophysite (i.e., the belief that there is only one nature in Jesus Christ). The Roman Church condemned Monophysitism as a heresy at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

8. An audio recording of a number of chants of the Chaldean tradition as it is preserved in South India can be found in Palackal (2002); for musical transcription of a few chants, see Husmann (1967:108–76) and Palackal (2001:233).

9. For a scholarly study on this topic, see Baselios ([1973] 1997).

10. The word *śabdam* in Malayalam denotes both sounds of inanimate objects (e.g., the sound of a moving vehicle) as well as human voice.

11. For example, a woman in love is referred to as *rāgiṇi,* and the romantic attraction between a man and a woman is *anurāgam.*

12. The history of the use of niṛam and rāgam in the context of eṭṭuniṛam remains to be explored.

13. Any relation between the Colors and rāgs in Hindustani music is a matter for separate inquiry.

14. There are about forty genuflections during the evening prayer.

15. Classical music is referred to in Indian languages as *śāstriya sangīt.*

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